

THE RICH WIFE.

A PRACTICAL TALE OF THE TIMES.

by ELLEN ASHTON.

"I wish Mary Elcott was richer!" exclaimed Charles Masters, as if thinking aloud, breaking the silence which had now lasted for more than five minutes at his friend's dinner table.

"And I second your wish, Masters," answered his companion, coolly cracking an almond, and drawing the wine toward him, "since you seem so heartily in earnest—although I cannot see why you should desire it so much. Is there not something more than a mere interest there, eh! Masters?"

"To be candid with you there is, or rather would be if Mary was bat rich. I have often been on the point of telling you my sentiments, but something has always intervened to prevent me. Now, however, I will put off my confession no longer. I admire; ardently admire Miss Elcott, and I am satisfied I could love her, provided she were only wealthy. You needn't smile. I am not, as you would suppose, a fortune-hunter—that is I do not consider a fortune the ne plus ultra ' in a wife—but as my means at present are just equal to my own wants, I cannot afford to get married unless I wed a bride who has some money at least"

"Stop—let me understand you. You say you cannot afford to get married because your income is only sufficient for your own wants. Now it is but the other day that you told me your profession yielded you two thousand dollars a year—surely it is not impossible to live, even when married, on such an income. I make but a bare fifteen hundred, and yet I should not be afraid to venture matrimony to-morrow, although it is true I should calculate on increasing my income in a year or two."

"Exactly; but you were always a saving fellow, even with your pocket money at school, when I have always liked to live a little more expensively. Now two

thousand dollars will just allow me to live as I wish, but even then it must be as a bachelor. There is my horse, and then my private parlor, and there is my annual trip to the springs—all these I must have, and to have them, I must spend my two thousand. Now if I get married, without I wed an heiress, I should have to give up all these—in other words I must surrender my tilbury and walk on foot, while my wife must patronize the omnibus or stay at home. Egad! just think of it—the lady of Charles Masters, Esq. Attorney at Law, running after a Chesnut street omnibus whenever she is tired and wishes to return home."

"All very humorous, my dear fellow—join me in a glass—but still it has little to do with the question; and since you have consulted me I will," he continued smiling, "give you, as the old women say, a bit of my mind. I dislike, as much as you, to deprive a wife of the comforts of life, but with your income, or even mine, there is little danger of doing that. The very thing which you cling to so perversely are luxuries, mere luxuries, nothing else under the sun. Possessed of the love of some virtuous woman you would soon learn to do without them—aye! and enjoy ten-fold more happiness than you do now. Believe me, my dear fellow, you are misleading yourself on this important subject. It is not necessary that you should marry an heiress. You can live, and respectably too, for the first year or two, on your present income; and after that, with your talents, and the standing marriage will give you, you need fear nothing. I do not speak what I am not willing to practice. You are a lawyer and I am a physician. Your profession can be made available sooner than mine. You have two thousand a year and I have but fifteen hundred ; and yet I am about to be married, and that to, I may as well tell you, Mary's younger sister. You have seen her, I believe, but once, for she returned only last week from New York, where, however, I met her last summer during my three months sojourn there. I have every reason to believe we shall be happy, even," and again he smiled, " on a bare fifteen hundred a year."

"You surprise me," said Masters, after a pause, "but still there is a difference betwixt your case and mine. Mary has high views of things, and as she could not, if married to me, live, at least for some years, in the style in which her father lives, she would—you may depend on it—grow discontented and

peevish. You shake your head, but it would, I am certain, be so. Even if I could give up these comforts, which you call luxuries, she could not—"

"Stop, my dear fellow, you misrepresent Mary. I know her well. She is not the kind of girl you pretend she is. I will not enter into details, but of this I can assure you," and here he emphasised his words, "that if Mary could love a man she would cheerfully give up every thing but the bare necessities of life, to follow his fortunes."

"Well—well, it may be. She is at any rate an angel. I have had hard work to keep myself from falling in love with her, although conscious of the folly of uniting my lot to hers in the present state of my finances. Confound this money—why had she not a few thousands, or why am I not richer?—I must stop thinking of her, or going there so often, for," and here he paused and added, "it cannot be. There is Charlotte Spencer, whom all my relatives wish me to marry—she is rich, pretty, accomplished—I suppose I shall have to propose to her, though, heaven knows! if Mary had but half her money I would prefer her. Well, after all there is an old saying that when poverty comes in the door, love flies out the window.' "

"As you please, Masters, but you are still deceiving yourself, by calling comfort poverty, and pretending that a wife will beggar you even with two thousand. I will say no more of Mary, except that I believe a nobler or more beautiful woman you will never find. She is a treasure in herself. Nor will I say ought of Miss Spencer, beyond a word—I fear she has a bad temper. And now, my dear fellow, let us dismiss this matrimonial debate, and take to our cigars—here are some choice Habanos."

Charles Masters, as our readers will have seen, was one of those young men who without being an actual fortune-hunter, deem some money indispensable in a wife—although, as in his case, they veil their real character from themselves by a course of deceptive sophistry, and will not admit the actual selfishness of their views. His friend, Henry Prescott, was of a different character. Love, with him, was a pure unalloyed passion—a sentiment in which nothing base took part—a holy exalted feeling which filled the heart with

sunshine, and would have made even privation endurable. He loved Ellen Prescott with his whole soul, and had long been satisfied that his love was returned. Indeed, as he said, their union was already settled. He saw with pain the determination of his friend, for he knew that Charles was a favorite with Mary, although, as yet, the feeling had not on her part ripened into a warmer sentiment—more, however, because the attentions of Charles had been nothing more than those of an acquaintance, and the strict principle in which Mary had been brought up, would not suffer her to throw away her affections unsought, and thus perhaps shipwreck her happiness forever. It was with an inward sigh, therefore, that Prescott heard, a few days after the above conversation, that the attentions of Charles to Miss Spencer were becoming of the most marked character. He saw also that Masters no longer visited the Elcotts. The love for display had triumphed over affections.

Meanwhile time slipped rapidly away, and rumors began to be prevalent that Charles had proposed for and been accepted by Miss Spencer. In a little time the report was confirmed by those who were believed to know, and to set all doubt at rest it was authorized by Charles himself. He met Prescott casually, for of late they had been less intimate than formerly.

"Ah ! my good monitor," he said, laughingly, " they tell me you and Ellen are to be married in a fortnight. Is it so? Glad to hear it. But I shall not be long behind you—egad! since I come to think of it, we shall be married on the same day. Miss Spencer is a fine, dashing girl—a cool fifty thousand is hers—we shall live in some style, but you must come and see us.

Cards and all that sort of thing will be sent you. But I forgot—I 've an appointment to look at a pair of carriage horses at eleven, and it now only wants five minutes of that hour. Good bye—I 'll see you soon."

"There goes a fine fellow who is about to sacrifice his happiness to his love of display," mused Prescott, as his eye followed the receding form of his friend; and with a sigh he turned and walked on.

They were married—Prescott and his bride seeking their simple, yet

comfortable home, while Mr. and Mr. Masters were whirled off on a fashionable tour from which they returned in due time to astonish the town by their splendid entertainments. But alas! even before the honey moon was over Masters found that his friend's anticipations were true, and that Mrs. Masters, though rich, beautiful and accomplished, threatened, by a peevish temper, to embitter his life. As time elapsed, moreover, the evil only increased, and about two months after the wedding, it was more than doubled by an event which then occurred. This was nothing more than the discovery—then first made by the final settlement of Mr. Spencer's estate—that his daughter was in reality worth but a bare ten thousand dollars. The knowledge of this circumstance could not fail to irritate a husband whose chief motive in marrying was to possess himself of his wife's fortune—crimination and recriminations ensued betwixt the ill-mated pair—and, as usual, the interview ended in a flood of tears on the part of the lady, and a volley of curses on that of the gentleman. Seizing his hat, Masters rushed from the house in no very enviable state of mind. Almost the first person he met was a mutual acquaintance of himself and Prescott.

"Ah! Masters—the very man I wanted to see—have you heard the news—I am glad of it for both their sake. I see you are ignorant, and that I am the first one to bring you the intelligence. Well then Prescott has had a glorious windfall in the way of fortune—his wife and her sister Mary have fallen co-heiresses to a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, left them by an East Indian uncle, whom they had not heard of for twenty years.

I once thought you and Mary would be married, but I was mistaken—she has been engaged you know a month and more to Mr. Leicester, your old rival. But I must hurry on. You look ill. I hope all is well at home. Remember me to your bride."

Masters did not speak, but, in his heart, he cursed the day he ever saw Miss Spencer, or refused the love of such an angel as Mary Elcott, for filthy lucre. He was rightly punished, in being tied for life to a peevish extravagant, and comparatively portionless woman.

If his story shall prove a lesson to our readers, our object in relating it will have been fulfilled. It is better to deal in truth, simple though it be, than in fiction, however gorgeous.